

Montana Wildlife Federation Testimony on HB 148

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee,

My name is Ben Lamb, and I am the Conservation Director for State and National Issues for the Montana Wildlife Federation. MWF is the Montana's oldest, and largest Hunting and Angling conservation organization, founded in 1936, and we currently have roughly 7500 members. We stand today in opposition to HB 148.

While well intentioned, HB 148 opens up a can of worms that need not be opened. First and foremost, this bill would have no effect on how federally owned public lands administer travel plans, and therefore, no significant amount of roads would be opened to motorized use. Secondly, the Department of Natural Resource and Conservation has valid reasons to disallow travel on some state trust lands, whether they be for weed control, livestock harassment, or delicate conditions that mandate restricted travel. As anyone who has hunted in Central or Eastern Montana knows, once a Bentonite road or two-track becomes muddy, there is no good use for motorized travel on those roads.

HB 148 further goes on to punish public employees that are stretched too thin to accommodate a mass of people wanting to take their four wheelers out to recover game. For example, the Game Warden for the Teton River north has an area that he patrols that is greater in size than the state of Rhode Island. This situation is repeated across the spectrum of public employees.

Retrieval of game is a sportsman's ethical duty. Game carts, horses, drag ropes and good old fashioned back packs have worked for the last 100 years. Part of your assessment of where to hunt must include how your retrieval will proceed. Hiking in 5-10 miles to get away from the noise and relatively low success rates of hunting areas close to roads comes with some grave responsibilities. So does entering in to lands of high wildlife use that are closer to roads. In the end, what matters most is what we as hunters undertake to ethically recreate, and that means that personal responsibility for harvest and retrieval must come in to play before we set out to the field and forests. We urge you to vote no on this bill.

Thank you,

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